

# Echoes of Bush in Obama's Speech

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There were moments during [President Obama's speech](#) last night when if you closed your eyes, imagined the grammar a little mangled and a few words mispronounced, you could easily make the mistake of thinking you were listening to President Bush. Not only was the announced troop increase what one might have expected from the Bush administration, but much of the rationale for the decision was as well.

Early in the speech, Obama referred to Afghanistan's election as "although it was marred by fraud... produced a government that is consistent with Afghanistan's laws and constitution." This reflects what we have come to expect from the Bush administration when speaking about election, a tendency to too strongly conflate elections with democracy as well as a willingness to overlook fraud when the outcome of the election is what the U.S. would have liked.

Obama recognized the seriousness of the current economic crisis in language stronger than what Bush might have used, but after referring to "the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression", did not even mention the economic impact of the continued war effort and how that will take resources away from our domestic economic problems. He also argued that "the nation that I'm most interested in building is our own", but again overlooked the obvious point that his plan in Afghanistan makes that task harder. While the president may not have stressed this, it is unlikely that this point was lost on the American people.

George Bush frequently underestimated the cost of the Iraq War which [some experts now place at over \\$3 trillion](#). Last night Obama asserted that the cost for his "new approach" will be "roughly \$30 billion for our military this year." Even if he is right, that is a lot of money, but unfortunately most wars end up costing significantly more than originally thought. There is little reason to think this war will be any different.

For much of the last five years of his presidency, George Bush consistently insulted the intelligence of the American people by referring to what was largely an American and British, and, since April of this year, just American, effort in Iraq as an allied effort. While other countries such as Poland and Georgia sent troops to Iraq who were courageous and served the effort well, the overwhelming majority of troops were from the U.S., and arguing otherwise was simply talking down to the American people. Obama did the same thing last night claiming that "I've asked that our commitment be joined by contributions from our allies... there will be further contributions in the days and weeks ahead" and referring to a "broad coalition of 43 nations." Again, the sacrifices made by these non-American troops are real and should not be overlooked, but [the estimates that 75% of the troops in Afghanistan will be American are real too](#).

Lastly, in a [departure from previous statements](#), Obama seemed to reflect the elite bipartisan consensus that of American exceptionalism stating that "Our union was founded in resistance to opposition. We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another nation's

resources." While one can expect the president of the United States to say things like this, the rhetoric is a little tired. Regardless of what the U.S. "seeks" to do, it occupies other nations, establishes military bases all over the world and aggressively covets other nation's resources. This rhetoric is dangerous because if we are constantly telling ourselves we do not seek to occupy other nations, it is easier to ignore the reality when we are doing just that.

Much of Obama's speech was different than what we were accustomed to hearing from President Bush as well. Obama voiced a strong critique of the decision to go to war in Iraq, downplayed the need for nation, actually state, building in Afghanistan and focused more on Pakistan and the need to look at Afghanistan and Pakistan together. However, he also a Bush like failure to explain why 30,000 more troops will be enough to achieve U.S. goals and what the exit strategy, as opposed to simply the timeline will be.

Obama's decision to send more troops to Afghanistan is a surprise to nobody as it was clear that in recent weeks he had eschewed all other options. Obama did not make this decision rashly or quickly, but based it on months of deliberation and consultations. In that respect he was very different from Bush. Nonetheless Obama's decision, at the very least, raises many questions. Last night when seeking to explain why he is sending more troops to Afghanistan, Obama left too many questions unanswered and offered unconvincing and unoriginal answers to others. Obama has surprised us in the past, particularly during his campaign. It would be great if he surprised us again on this issue, but last night's speech did not make this seem likely.